

## **THE TRAFFIC SIGNALS ON THE WATER WAYS**

By Richard Sorokin

Buoys and other markers are guides to the boater on the waterways. They identify safe passages and danger areas. They warn of restricted areas, give direction and information. A competent skipper must know the buoy system.

The most common buoy is the floating lateral marker. They mark the sides of safe channels. They are color coded and shape coded... Red buoys are always on the starboard side when returning from the sea. We say and remember “red, right returning”. Red buoys are also called “nuns”. They have a pointed top shape and have even numbers. Marking the port side of the channel are the green “can” buoys with odd numbers. This system is used in all inlets and is federally maintained. I mention this because there is more than one system of water signals. They are Federal, State, local and Inland Waterway markings.

State channel markers on inland waters tend to follow the rule red, right, returning when the channel is going inland or seaward.

The Inter Coastal Waterway system (ICW) uses day markers (poles in the ground) with red triangular markers and green square markers. The red triangles are on the right side of the channel when heading south, and the green squares are on right when heading north on the ICW.

When entering an ocean inlet and going from the federal markers to the ICW markers, there can be confusion. On our local inlet we return right with red and go north on the ICW. On the way the right red markers (federal) change to green markings for the ICW. You must know your local water traffic system.

The federal system also uses mid channel markers. These markers are both green and red. The important thing to remember is that the top color indicates the preferred channel for your vessel.

There are also what are called non-lateral buoys. These can be anywhere and do not mark channels. They give information about fuel docks and food availability and warning of possible danger areas. For example; food, fuel, rocks, no wake, swims areas, etc...

When navigating using charts or the GPS, remember these aides show where the markers are supposed to be not necessarily where they are. Storms and high winds can and do move buoys. .Never ASSUME, or you will make an ASS out of U and Me.